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THE

FAMINE OF SAMARIA:

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A

SERMON,

RECOMMENDING TRUST IN GOD, AND MODERATION AMONG ALL PARTIES, AT THE PRESENT CRISIS.

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A SERMON.

II. KINGS, 7. Chap. 1. 2. Verſes.

Then Eliſha ſaid, Hear ye the word of the LORD; *thus ſaith the* LORD, *To-morrow about this time* ſhall *a meaſure of fine flour* be ſold *for a ſhekel, and two meaſures of barley for a ſhekel, in the gate of Samaria.*

Then a lord on whoſe hand the king leaned, anſwered the man of God, and ſaid, Behold, if *the* LORD *would make windows in heaven, might this thing be? and he ſaid, Behold, thou ſhall ſee* it *with thine eyes, but ſhalt not eat thereof.*

ALL ſacred ſcripture is given by God for our inſtruction and improvement; but there are ſome parts of the Bible peculiarly intereſting to the feelings. There is a conciſeneſs, a ſimplicity, a clearneſs, an energy in the language, which none but the ſacred writers themſelves could ever attain.

The ſtory of which the text is a part, is told in ſo ſimple and intereſting a manner, that while it arreſts the attention of a child, it conveys a variety of uſeful inſtructions to the philoſopher and the Chriſtian.

It is the hiſtory of a ſiege and a famine: a hiſtory from which at all times we might derive improvement; but more eſpecially at a time when we ourſelves are at war, and all Europe in a ſtate, ſomething approaching to a famine.—Let us take a view of the whole ſtory.

Benhadad, king of Syria gathered all his hoſt, and went up, and beſieged Samaria. —We are not informed as to the cauſes of the war. Jehoram the king of Iſrael was a bad man, and probably had given ſome offence; but Benhadad the king of Syria ſeems to have been a proud ambitious monarch, who, regardleſs of right or wrong, ſought his own aggrandiſement. We find him on a former occaſion, in the days of Ahab, with thirty and two kings under his command, beſieging Samaria, and inſulting the God of Iſrael; and, notwithſtanding all

his inſolent boaſting, and vaſt army, which *filled the whole country*, twice beaten, by ſo ſmall a number of men, that they appeared *like two flocks of kids.*

In thoſe unhappy times, men ſeemed created only to ſlaughter one another for the amuſement of their deſpotic maſters. *And Abner ſaid to Joab, Let the young men riſe and play before us; and Joab ſaid, let them them ariſe; and there aroſe twelve men belonging to each, and they caught every one his fellow by the head, and thruſt his ſword in his fellow's ſide; ſo they fell down together.*—This dreadful play was acted for the amuſement of two captains. The plays of their Maſters were in proportion bloody.—The kings of Iſrael and Syria were long brothers in iniquity and rivals in war. The nations were no doubt taught to conſider each other as natural enemies. But the Almighty Ruler of the univerſe made uſe of the pride and ambition of Benhadad to chaſtiſe the wickedneſs of the Iſraelites. We find it declared in the 26. Chap. of Levit. that *if they would not hearken unto God, nor do his commandments, he would ſet his face againſt them, he would break the pride of their power, and the ſtaff of their bread; and that they ſhould eat the fleſh of their ſons, and the fleſh of their daughters.* In the 28. Chap. of Deuteronomy, we find it alſo denounced, that, if they would not *hearken unto the voice of the Lord their God to obſerve and do all his commandments*; that, among other puniſhments, which he would inflict upon them, he would *bring a nation againſt them of fierce countenance, who ſhould beſiege them in all their gates, until they ſhould eat the fruit of their own body, the fleſh of their ſons, and of their daughters.*

Theſe denunciations were dreadfully accompliſhed upon the Iſraelites on the preſent occaſion. The famine within the walls of Samaria was more dreadful than the war without; for, *behold, they beſieged it, until an aſs's head was ſold for fourſcore pieces of ſilver, and the fourth part of a cab of doves dung for five pieces of ſilver. And as the king of Iſrael was paſſing by upon the wall, there cried a woman unto him, ſaying, help, my lord, O King. And he ſaid, if the LORD do not help thee, whence ſhall I help thee? out of the barn floor, or out of the wine preſs? And the king ſaid unto her, What aileth thee? And ſhe anſwered, this woman ſaid unto me, Give thy ſon, that we may eat him to day, and we will eat my ſon to morrow. So we boiled my ſon and did eat him: and I ſaid unto her on the next day, Give thy ſon, that we may eat him: and ſhe hath hid her ſon.* Dreadful ſituation! Who can

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read the hiſtory of it without horror, tho' it happened near three thouſand years ago! What then muſt we think of the Syrians who produced all this miſery; who ſat without the gates, liſtening to every tale which was brought them of the diſtreſs of the Samaritans, with a kind of infernal rapture. They were heathens, it is true, but they were men: and to what a ſtate of perverſity and depravity muſt men be reduced, before they can find pleaſure in the torture and miſery of their fellow creatures!

Jehoram the king was greatly moved at this extreme miſery of his people; *And it came to paſs, when the king heard the words of the woman, that he rent his clothes; and he paſſed by upon the wall, and the people looked, and, behold, he had ſackcloth within upon his fleſh.* He felt for the calamity, and he mourned for it; but it does not appear that he mourned for the cauſes of it, or repented of the ſins, which had provoked heaven to bring it down. "The worſt man may grieve for his ſmart, only the good can grieve for his offence." Inſtead of being penitent, inſtead of repenting of his own idolatry; inſtead of lamenting the crimes of Ahab his father, and Jezebel his mother, and the wickedneſs of his people in general; all which were the true cauſes of ſuch dreadful viſitations; he is quite furious, and turns all his rage on innocence, nay on virtue; on the man whoſe counſel when followed never failed to deliver his country: *God do ſo to me and more alſo*, ſays he, *if the head of Eliſha, the ſon of Shaphat ſhall ſtand on him this day.*—Alas! what had Eliſha done?—what ground was there for the king's diſpleaſure? Had he reproved the nation of their wickedneſs? Had he forewarned them of the alarming evils that would overtake them for it? or did the king think, the prophet could have averted the ſiege and famine by his prayers, and would not? Ignorant and fooliſh man! To ſuppoſe the prophet ſo eminently wiſe and good above his fellows, that he could command omnipotence, and ſcatter armies by the ſhaking of a leaf; and yet ordain his death!—All Iſrael did not afford a head ſo guiltleſs, ſo wiſe, ſo intent upon the public welfare, as this that was now deſtined to the ſtroke of the executioner.

In the midſt of this ſcene of dire calamity, in Samaria, and the ſtorm and tumult of Jehoram's mind, *Eliſha ſat* ſerenely *in his houſe, and the elders ſat with him*; lamenting no doubt, the ſins and miſery of his people, and conferring about

about the iſſue of their preſent calamity. God revealed to him the bloody deſign of Jehoram. *See ye*, ſaid he, addreſſing himſelf to the elders who ſat with him, in the bold language of the ſervant of the king of kings,—*ſee ye how this ſon of a murderer hath ſent to take away mine head!*—this ſon of Ahab, the murderer of Naboth and the Lord's prophets—his ſon not only by birth, but diſpoſition and bloody mindedneſs—*look when the meſſenger cometh, ſhut the door, and hold him faſt at the door—Is not the ſound of his maſter's feet behind him? And while he yet talked with them, behold the meſſenger came down unto him:* and ſaid, in the name of his maſter, *Behold this evil is of the Lord, what ſhould I wait for the Lord any longer.*

From this it would appear that Eliſha had, during the diſtreſs of the city, preached up patience to the king, and perſuaded him to truſt in God for deliverance; but he, impatiently, and impiouſly, charges God fooliſhly as the author of all their miſery; and would wreak his vengeance againſt the Almighty upon his innocent ſervant. O blind infidel!—O preſumptuous madman!—

The king himſelf, the ſound of whoſe feet was immediately behind the meſſenger, was now arrived in the preſence of the prophet. But Eliſha feared not the face of man. His ſoul was ſerene and undaunted. He was inſpired by the ſpirit of prophecy. He ſaw the ſpeedy relief of the city, the ſudden turn their affairs would take, the plenty that next day awaited them. And notwithſtanding the ill uſage he had received, and the bloody intention of Jehoram towards him, he announces to them the joyful tidings. "*Then Eliſha ſaid, Hear ye the word of the* LORD; *thus ſaith the* LORD, *To-morrow about this time* ſhall *a meaſure of fine flour* be ſold *for a ſhekel, and two meaſures of barley for a ſhekel, in the gate of Samaria. Then a lord on whoſe hand the king leaned, anſwered the man of God, and ſaid, Behold,* if *the* LORD *would make windows in heaven, might this thing be? and he ſaid, Behold, thou ſhalt ſee* it *with thine eyes, but ſhalt not eat thereof.*"

Prophecies before they are fulfilled are enigmas, no ſpirit can underſtand their meaning but that by which they are delivered. There ſeemed ſo little probability of any immediate abundance, that one can hardly wonder that the king

king and his attendants, who were more inclined to idolatry than the worſhip of the one true God, ſhould have given but little credit to Eliſha.

This unbelief was however a great crime. The Iſraelites had ſeen a perpetual ſeries of wonders wrought for their deliverance. This very Jehoram himſelf, had been conſtrained by diſtreſs, and the advice of the good Jehoſhaphat, to have recourſe to Eliſha, about three years before this, and been an eye witneſs of a miracle: he had led his army into a wilderneſs where there was no water: On his application, Eliſha at firſt treated him with great boldneſs; deſired him to go to the prophets of his father and the prophets of his mother; yet on account of his reſpect for Jehoſhaphat, and compaſſion for the armies of Iſrael and Judah; he commanded them to fill the valley full of ditches, when lo, on the morrow, as he had propheſied, there came water, without wind or rain, and filled the country.

This eminent ſervice of Eliſha ſeems to have ſo far made an impreſſion on the mind of Jehoram, that when the prophet foretold the relief of Samaria, the king was diſarmed of his rage, and at leaſt expreſſed no doubt, whatever he thought in his own mind, of his veracity.—But an infidel Courtier on whoſe hand the king leaned, ſaid, *Behold, if the* LORD *would make windows in heaven, might this thing be?*—He even doubts, if windows were made in heaven and food rained down as manna was of old, whether their diſtreſſes could be relieved.—He either diſbelieved the power of God, or the veracity of the prophet. Yet Eliſha had performed many wonderful things in the eyes of all Iſrael, and, one would think, muſt have fully eſtabliſhed his authority as a prophet; and if this lord had believed in God at all, he muſt have known, that the arm of omnipotence can eaſily effect thoſe things which appear altogether impoſſible to man. Could not he have increaſed the corn and meal of Samaria as he had done the widows oil?—But this proud infidel was to ſuffer for his unbelief—Behold ſaid the prophet, *thou ſhalt ſee it with thine eyes, but ſhalt not eat thereof.*—

His fate which the prophet foretold ought to afford us a uſeful leſſon. It ſhould teach us never to diſtruſt, nor to deſpair of the goodneſs of Providence,

whoſe arm is never ſhortned that it cannot ſave. Even in the deepeſt diſtreſs, when there is no appearance of deliverance, the Almighty can reſcue us:—he can blow with his wind, and ſcatter our enemies;—he can make plenty ſmile in a barren land, and water ſprings of a dry ground.—

Never ſurely was there a more calamitous ſituation than that of Samaria at this moment. Reduced to feed on things the moſt unwholſome, the leaſt nutritious, and the moſt unclean; nay their tender and delicate women, rendered ſo brutally ravenous, as to devour their own tender offspring. Nature ſhudders at the thought! But from this ſtate how unexpected, how ſudden was their deliverance!—

Four lepers, men excluded on account of their loathſome diſeaſe, from all intercourſe with ſociety, ſat at the entering in of the gate.—They ſaw nothing but death before them: famine within the walls; and the enemy without.—They had no choice but to die of hunger or *fall to the enemy*.—Dreadful alternative! Perhaps the enemy might have ſome pity,—hunger had none.—They reſolved upon the leſſer evil.—If the enemy killed them, they could but die.—To the camp of the Syrians they came.—They approached it in the twilight; *but there was no man*.—Silence and ſolitude reigned, where they expected to have found a multitude of armed men.—They looked and liſtened with anxious dread:—the ſound of their own ſteps alarmed them.

But an alarm far more dreadful had ſeized on the hearts of the Syrians:—*For the Lord had made the hoſt of the Syrians to hear a noiſe of chariots, and a noiſe of horſes, even the noiſe of a great hoſt. Wherefore they roſe and fled in the twilight, and left their tents, and their horſes, and their aſſes, even the camp as it was, and fled for their life.*

The wicked fleeth, when no man purſueth. The Syrians after having brought much diſtreſs upon the Samaritans, without gaining either honour or advantage to themſelves, were at laſt ſubdued, without an enemy, by a ſhadowy army—their own unſubſtantial fears:—an empty ſound ſcattered them:—panic ſtruck they fled, half dead with terror:—amazed, and breathleſs they returned home, leaving *their horſes, their aſſes, their ſilver and gold, their proviſions, and all their ſubſtance*

ſubſtance behind them. Only air-built chariots and horſes purſued them. Diſaſter and diſgrace accompanied their flight: their very clothes were caſt away to accelerate their ſteps.

Thus ended the proud armament of Benhadad. Thus, for the moſt part, have, in all ages, the boaſted *armadas* of profligate ambition, been in the end covered with ſhame; and annihilated by the breath of the Almighty's diſpleaſure.—But no example of paſt times was ever yet a warning to heedleſs power and irritated paſſion.

The Samaritans, being informed of the flight of the Syrians by the lepers, and having fully aſcertained the fact, *went out and ſpoiled the tents of the Syrians. So a meaſure of fine flour was* ſold *for a ſhekel, and two meaſures of barley for a ſhekel, according to the word of the* LORD. *And the king appointed the lord on whoſe hand he leaned to have the charge of the gate: and the people trode upon him in the gate, and he* died, *as the man of God had ſaid, who ſpake when the king came down to him.*

Thus was ſpeedily fulfilled the prophecy of Eliſha: thus was the ſiege unexpectedly raiſed, and abundance ſupplied to the famiſhed Samaritans; and the unbelieving lord made an eye witneſs of Eliſha's veracity, without being a ſharer of the plenty which he had foretold: for neceſſity, like death, levels all diſtinctions; hunger has no reſpect to greatneſs; and he was innocently trodden down by the people in their eagerneſs to ſupply their wants.—His fate is an awful leſſon on faith and humility.—No power of words can add to its effect.—

Let us learn from the whole of this intereſting, and inſtructive ſtory, never to be weary of *waiting for the Lord*, however heavily preſent evils may preſs upon us; never to be fretful and diſcontented with providence, however gloomy the ſituation of public affairs may appear.

Whatever be the evils of which we may at any time complain, war, famine, violated rights, or the attempts of violent men to overturn our conſtitution: whatever be the danger we dread, or the good we wiſh—the evils may ſoon be removed—

removed—the object we wiſh attained—but like the favourite of Jehoram, we may be trodden in the duſt, and never taſte the benefit of it.—What is the form of a Government—what is the name of a king—to the millions who fall in the conteſt about the one or the other? They hear not the voice of the oppreſſor—they taſte not the plenty produced by juſt laws, and mild government.

I would not however damp the ſpirit of patriotiſm, or adviſe any man to be unconcerned for the public intereſt:—far, very far from it:—the man who feels not for the welfare of his country, and the happineſs of poſterity, and would not riſque his life to preſerve them, deſerves not the protection of ſociety. Let us feel an honeſt enthuſiaſm for what we deem right: But let us take care to inform our reaſon and not become the dupes of blind prejudice, or of deſigning men: let us take care to moderate the violence of our paſſions, and not imbitter life by angry diſputes, or ſour diſcontents. The event of all things is under the direction of God. Let us rely on his Providence. And let us never raſhly throw the blame of public misfortunes entirely on any individual, leſt we condemn the innocent, as Jehoram did Eliſha. But let us honeſtly inſpect our own hearts, and ſee how far our own ſins and follies have contributed to produce the calamities which we deplore.

The ſtate of the world at this moment preſents to our view the moſt awful and alarming ſcenes.—Though happily removed by our ſituation from the more immediate evils of war and famine, yet we muſt in ſome degree be affected by them.—Laſt year many of the fineſt fields in Europe, inſtead of waving with yellow harveſts, gleamed with deadly arms. The devaſtations occaſioned by camps, by battles, routs and pillage, combined with an unfavourable ſeaſon,—which God, no doubt, in mercy ſent, to bring infuriate mortals to their ſenſes,—has produced, in every kingdom on the continent, an extreme ſcarcity.—Even in various parts of this kingdom an alarm of ſcarcity has gone forth, which has produced deſtructive tumults.

But let us, my Brethren, ſit ſtill in our houſes, like Eliſha, with ſerenity of ſoul; converſe with the elders, the wiſe, the moderate and good; and wait the ſalvation of God.—If war has produced famine, famine will put an end to the

war.

war. Already even amidſt the ſtorm, peace ſeems hovering on the wing, about to make her neſt in thoſe fields from which ſhe had been ſcared. When ſhe does alight—O! let us not diſturb her again, by petty broils among ourſelves about the cauſes of her flight.—Alas! my Brethren, we are all guilty.—Did not the nation at large, through all its ranks, as it were, ſhout for the battle? The ſtill ſmall voice of reaſon was drowned in the ſtorm.—The intereſted were numerous no doubt;—but the great multitude were actuated, even while they called for war, by principles of humanity.—A murdered king—a degraded nobility—a pillaged prieſthood, implored their compaſſion. I honour their feelings, while I lament their miſtake, the fatal effects of which cannot yet be told. Reaſon begins to reſume her throne, with Pity by her ſide, ſhedding tears over the ruins which blind fury has created. Our Commanders, equally diſtinguiſhed for their courage and humanity, even in the moment of victory, when crowned with conqueſt, lament over the enemies' ſlain.* This is Chriſtian like, and augurs well.—The world I truſt will adopt this ſpirit—feel that they are brethren—the offspring of God—the heirs of the ſame promiſes—the expectants of the ſame reward.—

May the Great Father of all, look down from heaven upon his children!—forgive their errors,—pardon their ſins,—bind up their wounds,—and heal their diviſions:—May He relieve their wants,—drop plenty from the clouds,—cauſe the earth to bring forth, and the fields to flouriſh:—May He eſtabliſh peace in our borders,—and grant us his bleſſing!

*See Lord Henry Powlett's Letter, in the *London Gazette*, 18th April.

FINIS.